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ABSTRACT

Today, in this country, there is widespread public support for educational testing, evidenced by the large amount of state minimum competency testing legislation, and recent public opinion surveys. Despite a basically favorable view of standardized testing, parents are concerned about the effects of test anxiety and poor test-taking skills on performance, and about how tests are used. Teachers are concerned that tests will be inappropriately used to judge school effectiveness, that tests are biased, and that the emphasis on testing could narrow the curriculum. Nader's Public Interest Research Groups have been actively fighting standardized testing and promoting "truth-in-testing" legislation. These and other legislative efforts to regulate testing have focused on regulating testing companies, rather than regulating the use of tests. Based on this context, six categories of instructional activities and assistance related to testing are needed: (1) to provide testing directors with the necessary non-measurement skills; (2) to help educators meet federal assessment requirements; (3) to help in designing measurement programs that are cost- and person-efficient; (4) to demystify the testing process; (5) to prepare test takers for the testing situation; and (6) to help educators and lay persons to participate wisely in the testing process. (Author/BW)

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Testing in the '80s: An Agenda for Action

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We could trace standardized testing much farther back in history but let me start with the year 1865 - the year the New York State Regents Examinations were initially established to certify minimum levels of competence for elementary schools. Then in 1878 when the Regents Exam was established for high schools it became the first instance of the now current trend for mandated high school competency examinations. It was 1900 at the turn of the century when the College Board was first formed. The situation that then confronted students was chaotic--each college had its own entrance examination, often covering different subject matter. The development of a uniform system of college entrance examinations did much to bring order out of chaos and extend freedom of choice for students.

In the years since, national testing programs have been developed for various membership associations as a means of helping colleges, universities, and professional schools make the best possible match between the institution and the students who seek admission. The intervening years have seen other significant developments in school related testing. For example, the accountability movement and the discovery that students were leaving schools unprepared in verbal and math skills has led in recent years to a proliferation of basic skills/minimum competency assessment programs, most often mandated by state legislatures or other public bodies such as state boards of education.

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Invited speech to the Southeastern Invitational Training Conference for Continuing Education Administrators and Practitioners, April 1981.

Another development of significance is that requirements for program evaluation and procedural safeguards in student assessments began appearing in federal laws - laws which authorize funds for developing and implementing all sorts of special programs at the state and local level. In more recent years there has been increasing demand for test data that could be aggregated or summarized across individual schools, school districts, and states to provide some evidence or measurement of the educational yield from federal dollars.

State legislators and governors have also become concerned about the quality of education in their states, the payoffs from monies allocated to education, generally, and data which might guide specific allocations for education in the future.

These developments were accompanied by increased production of nationally norm-referenced standardized achievement tests by a number of organizations. Test publishers courted school based people in efforts to convince these "buyers" that their product was the answer to the school's needs. In too many cases the educational "buyers" were not sufficiently knowledgeable to make wise selections.

More recently there has been a growing discontentment among teachers and others that such standardized tests do not test what is taught, that the results are of little use, and that the time taken in administering the tests is - wasteful at least and probably harmful. Such discontentment contributed to the also recent growth of an attitude on the part of the educational establishment that tests should be "criterion-referenced", specifically tailored to local or state objectives, and provide score information that can be used in a rather direct fashion in planning instruction for individual children.

The desire for locally tailored tests and an increasing demand by teachers and others to be involved in the testing process has led to the existence of

groups of people who make all sorts of decisions about testing but who have had no formal training in tests and measurement.

The desire for locally tailored more-useful tests has led increasingly to the establishment of testing or assessment units (with their own staff) within state departments of education and within the local school district central office. There are tremendous implications for continuing education in this particular development. For many years, and currently in fact, the courses of study in higher education which are available for those interested in measurement have been primarily designed to produce professors of educational measurement. In many cases young people who are quite competent in statistics and measurement are put into positions which frequently require much more in the way of skills in financial and people management, and skills to deal with contractors, subject matter panels, politicians, advisory groups, the media, and with lawyers and judges.

Today in this country, indeed throughout the world, there is widespread public support for educational testing. One practical evidence of such support is the extent to which it has been manifested in state legislatures and other public bodies, a fact I mentioned previously. The growing trend toward statewide minimum competency testing, based largely on public demands for accountability in schools, shows no sign of abating in the 1980s. More than 30 states now have some form of mandated minimum competency program for students. Moreover, there is an emerging trend toward legislated minimum competency tests for teachers.

The 1977 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools revealed that 65 percent of the people believe that all high school students should be required to pass a standardized nationwide examination in order to

qualify for a high school diploma, compared with a 50 percent affirmative response 10 years earlier.

A more recent 1979 survey by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, found strong support for the idea of standardized college admissions testing among parents of high school age children. Parents' support for standardized testing generally is so strong, in fact, that the vast majority of parents would like to see the role of testing expanded to include requiring basic skills tests for students and standardized tests for teachers in the subjects they will teach before they begin teaching in public schools. Fifty-one percent of parents go so far as endorsing the idea that consumers would be better off if people had to pass written tests before they became mechanics or repairmen.

This is not to say that we will continue to test more and more in the 1980s. The demands from varying sources for test information has already led to extensive and multiple testing programs in elementary and secondary schools across the country. Mandated state testing programs (often including both norm-referenced testing and basic skills testing statewide) can be found in combination with locally required CRT and NRT programs. In addition, these are then joined by testing required by federal programs for needs assessment and program evaluation. One of my colleagues in Mobile County Alabama recently commented "if it moves in Mobile County it gets tested -- and tested and tested." This situation is not uncommon at all and has led educators and parents to seriously question "the need for all this testing" and ask both about the purposes which testing should serve and whether fewer tests can do the entire job as well. Educators, hopefully with the assistance of research and measurement people, will be seeking answers to these questions in the 1980s. The need for additional training to increase the abilitites of the educators to tackle these problems seems obvious to me.

The marked expansion in testing since 1900 has been accompanied by considerable controversy and concern about the role and value of standardized testing. Although the role of testing in American society has been debated from the earliest stages of development of standardized testing, in recent years, the debate has shifted from the professional arena of psychologists and educators to the public arena. This increased public interest in testing is reflected in a number of ways:

...Discussion of the merits of standardized tests has increased in the popular press. The print and electronic media have given a good deal of attention to various testing issues including declining test scores, the effects of coaching, and the question of racial bias.

...Standardized tests and testing organizations have been under sharp attack by various activist groups.

...Perhaps most visible of all are the legislative initiatives, particularly at the state levels, which are aimed at regulating standardized testing.

The discussion in the popular press, the attack on tests and testing, and the legislative initiatives, in my judgment will continue at least through the early 1980's, and certainly have continued through the early part of 1981.

Let us revisit the Yankelovich, Skelly, and White survey for a minute. Despite a basic favorable view of standardized testing, as reported by that survey, parents expressed a number of concerns about, and criticisms of, standardized testing. Their concerns can be divided into those dealing with tests and test taking and those dealing with test use.

0 Tests and Test Taking. Perhaps the principal source of concern about test taking among parents of high school age children is the widely held

belief (90% agree) that some students do poorly on standardized tests because of less-developed test taking skills.

Another aspect of the test taking process that is of widespread concern to parents is test anxiety. Three out of four (74%) parents believe that one of the problems with college admissions tests is the anxiety they create in students.

- Test Use: Parents are also very concerned about how tests are used. Parents believe that there is too much reliance on test scores in decision-making about college admissions and that colleges should make more use of high school grades and teacher recommendations and less use of standardized tests.

A recent conference in Memphis provides a much smaller sample than the Yankelovich one. The discussion of testing was left open and the focus of concerns voiced by the parents was very clearly on tests administered in elementary and secondary schools rather than on admissions tests. They expressed concern about not understanding the reports they receive from the schools and therefore being unable to use the information to help their child. They were concerned that test scores would be used to label or categorize their child and and not really be used to help their child. They wanted to be better informed and more involved.

Teacher groups have also identified some of their concerns about ways in which tests are used. For example the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) points out "a concerned public searching for simple ways to judge school effectiveness may exaggerate their importance and, as a consequence, misuse their results."

The AFT further warns against any narrowing of the curriculum or the focus of schooling to include only those areas which produce measureable results.

AFT concludes "the problem of test abuse will not be solved by simply calling for the abolition of standardized tests. Such tests do provide us with a general measure of academic achievement in the basic skills. However, "a concerted effort must ... be made to educate the public as to their strengths and weaknesses and to develop a more thorough awareness of their proper uses and definite limitations." AFT also states "school systems must make a greater effort to train teachers and other educational personnel on testing procedures and analysis. They must also involve teachers more fully in planning and executing testing programs." (This is a common concern of teachers and parents, especially with regard to mandated testing programs.)

The National Education Association (NEA) has also identified a number of concerns about tests, but the solution for the NEA was to propose a nation-wide moratorium on standardized testing. NEA states that group standardized achievement test scores often become an end in themselves rather than being used for sound educational purposes.

They further argue that standardized tests: (1) are biased against those who are economically disadvantaged or who are culturally or linguistically different; they are (2) invalid, unreliable, out-of-date, and restricted to the measurement of cognitive skills--most of the really important aspects of student programs are not measured by tests.

There is excessive use of standardized test scores to make judgments about human life and aspirations. They are used by the media as a basis for insidious public comparisons of student achievement test scores.

Three-quarters of surveyed NEA teachers say that teachers should be able to attend courses on how to use the scores. Most teachers have no training in psychometrics or statistics it was reported. --- Often teachers have had no

courses at all in testing, but the number of SATs administered is minascule compared with the number of teacher-made tests each year.

The university campus-based arm of Ralph Nader's organization call themselves Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs). PIRG joins NEA in stating that "standardized tests control the lives, careers, occupations, and aspirations of millions of Americans throughout elementary and secondary school and at the turning points of their lives when decisions about college, graduate school or various jobs are being made. They are damaging to a student's self concept and contribute to the self fulfilling prophecy whereby a student's achievement tends to fulfill the negative expectations held by others."

Public Interest Research Groups have been actively fighting standardized testing and promoting so called truth-in-testing legislation. They maintain that testing orgainzations are secret (deliberately so), purposely restricting access to information about the process--that is access by those who are affected and concerned about the quality and effects of testing.

PIRG further argues that "colleges and universities rely heavily on standardized tests to determine which student will gain admission to their institution, and despite the importance of these tests, most students do not have a clear understanding of what their test scores mean. This is due in part to the limited information which prospective test takers receive regarding a test." This agrument continues. "Students feel especially frustrated because they cannot know what questions they answered correctly or incorrectly and they must blindly trust that their score was not affected by computer scoring error. In addition, because test agencies keep past test contents secret, test takers and the public attribute a mystique to the test process that promotes a misunderstanding of standardized tests." I might comment here that much of the information

is readily available. During the last few years even more information has been made available, including questions and answers, at least for some of the major admission testing programs.

A major survey of student attitudes and reactions to the Scholastic Aptitude Test was completed in 1978. The report indicates that high school seniors believe the tests to be fair, but remain skeptical about the way colleges use SAT scores.

More students said it was a poor idea rather than a good idea to do away with the SAT. The margin favoring the SAT was about 2 to 1.

Objections to the test were based on perceptions that some students do poorly because the SAT makes them nervous, that the test is too limited in what it measures, and that the SAT should not be the only consideration in college selection.

The United States Student Association in their 1979-80 Policy Platform indicated concern about a number of aspects of standardized testing and strongly endorsed legislation - largely on the basis that it would "promote better understanding of the tests as well as improve their quality."

Legislation to Regulate Standardized Testing

The growing debate/controversy over standardized tests has led, in some cases to support for legislation to regulate standardized testing. In California and New York support was substantial enough to result in enactment of laws. Since the first of these bills was passed (California) something over 20 states have considered similar legislation. Only in the case of New York has a law resulted. In Florida, HB 1121 was introduced last session by Representatives Meek and Sheldon. The bill was also introduced in the Senate by Gordon, with Barron and Williams shown as cosponsors. A similar bill, HB3, was introduced by Rep. Meek again this year. The Florida bill and most of the others are either substantially identical to or modeled after the New York bill. I think it might be useful to look

very briefly at the scope and requirements of these bills.

0 Scope: The law applies to any test given at test subject expense, designed for use or used in the process of selection for postsecondary or professional school admission. There are some exceptions where the bills cover practically every kind of testing (e.g., elementary school, secondary schools, civil service, certification and licensing).

0 Disclosure: of interpretative and validity information; service warranties; statement of any candidate property interests in scores.

0 Filing of technical data. Any study, evaluation or statistical report pertaining to test where test agency prepares, causes preparation or provides data.

0 Disclosure of Test Questions and Answers. Questions and answers filed within 30 days after score release and to candidate on request (nominal fee).

The New York law was introduced in 1979 by Senator Kenneth LaValle and took effect January 1, 1980. While the total impact of that legislation is still not yet known, there have been several significant developments which I can share with you today:

0 Many testing programs were forced to withdraw from operating in New York (approximately 20 of 26). Initially those operated by ETS and the American College Testing Program were the only ones to remain.

The twenty or so programs which withdrew from the state included several tests used for admission to highly competitive health related programs such as medicine and dentistry. Also withdrawn were tests such as the Miller Analogies Test which was used by many graduate level programs in the State. In the words of New York Commissioner of Education, Gordon Ambach, withdrawal of those tests was "expected to have the greatest impact on applicants with prior academic backgrounds which are questionable or unfamiliar to the institutions."

0 Accessibility to remaining testing programs was reduced. Each of the five programs ETS administers cut back services and/or raised fees.

The number of regular administrations was reduced in New York and special testing was curtailed sharply. Tests were and still are given on fewer dates than before; walk-in centers are closed; special arrangements for handicapped citizens, Saturday Sabbath observers, military personnel, and late applicants to colleges and universities had to be reduced or eliminated. The reduction in services had probably the greatest impact on the physically handicapped and Saturday Sabbath observers.

0 The American Association of Medical Colleges and the College Board both brought suit, each on different issues. A preliminary injunction was granted to AAMC.

0 The Senator who sponsored the bill in New York, Mr. LaValle, held hearings in late February of 1980 to consider amendments, presumably to lessen the impact of the law. The Commissioner of Education, who opposed the legislation from the outset, at that time suggested language which would reduce the disclosure requirements and protect the rights of institutions in keeping certain information confidential. An amended LaValle bill is now in effect.

Those test sponsors who remained in New York are complying with the law but, as mentioned previously, with reductions in services.

Test sponsors have also realigned staff and resources for purposes of intense research and development in areas where the law causes serious technical and practical problems.

Testing Legislation - A Summary Statement

Two main concerns that have been raised over and over in discussions of need for legislation. First, the concern expressed by students and PIRG groups is that more information about the tests should be provided to test takers in particular, and also test users, and the public. A second concern, expressed by a number of different groups deals with the appropriate use of the information derived from tests. These concerns are most frequently stated with regard to possible misuse of or overreliance on test results in educational decision making.

Legislation which regulates testing agencies activities does not cover decisions on whether or not to use tests, decisions on the extent of testing necessary, and educational decisions made in the part on the basis of test data. These decisions are made by others, not in the employment of testing companies. The proponents of current legislation have created some confusion on this point. Ralph Nader and the NEA have focused their attacks on the use of tests by schools and colleges; they settled for regulating testing companies as a political expedient. They judged that any effort to regulate schools and colleges directly, however desirable in their view, would not be politically feasible.

Advisory and Instructional Services
Need, Current Activities, Plans

Now - what does all this have to do with a 1980 Agenda for Action, especially one which would be of interest to those concerned with adult and continuing education? A great deal I think. Six categories of instructional activities and assistance related to testing are and will be needed:

1. to provide testing directors with non-measurement skills required for success in their jobs (Remember my mention of the fact that they are very competent in measurement and statistics, but the job requires other skills also.)

2. to help educators meet federal requirements for assesing students and evaluating programs (Recall my mention of the fact that many practicing educators have had little or no training in measurement or program evaluation.)
3. to help educational staff design or redesign a measurement program that not only serves the data needs of state and local education agencies and that is also cost and person-efficient (remember the reference to "all that testing")
4. to demystify the testing process for test takers, test users, and the public
5. to prepare test takers to most effectively use the testing situation to demonstrate what they know and what they can do
6. to help educators and lay persons participate wisely in the process of selecting, implementing, developing and/or USING test instruments and data

As part of the ETS Program for Continuing Education we currently offer in-service programs to meet some of these varying needs. More needs to be done. For the remaining time I have, let me briefly comment on each of the needs I have just mentioned.

With respect to the non-measurement skills needed by testing directors, our strategy has been to encourage universities to reconsider their programs of study and to give serious thought to expanded internship programs. We have also used our own staff in combination with consultants or jointly with other organizations to develop inservice offerings for such individuals.

Assistance to meet federal requirements for assessing students and evaluating programs has taken the form of numerous workshops and technical assistance. The ETS Southern Regional Office has a large federal contract to provide technical assistance to state departments and local school districts in eight states in the Southeast in evaluating their ESEA Title I Compensatory education programs. At

the moment we have under consideration by an external funding source a proposal to develop measurement training programs for special education personnel. The programs will be designed to assist parents, local school administrators, and team members fulfill the assessment-related mandates in Public Law 94-142, the federal statute for education of all handicapped children.

Assistance in designing or redesigning measurement programs (to be both cost and person efficient) in my mind necessarily involves both formal instructional programs and consultation or technical assistance. The unique aspects of particular local districts, for example, require a consultation mode.

Demystification of the testing process is a major proposal of many who support legislation. Of the many comments I could make at this point I will voice only a few. First, is seems clear to me that much,--no, most,--of the information called for in legislation is already available. It is not known by students and others that it is available. We obviously have not been successful in our efforts to convey information to those who wish and need it in ways that are meaningful. The challenge is one that will be given substantial effort in the future. Second, it has become blatantly clear that more information must get through to state legislators and their staff. Seminars, workshops, institutes, short courses - I don't know the right way to approach this area but attention it needs.

Preparation for test takers is not only provided by materials from test publishers/sponsors, but also by regular schools, and by professional coaching schools. Test taking strategies is an area in which our requests for inservice workshops has increased substantially in the last few years, primarily from school-based personnel who want to offer courses for their students.

The last need that I will comment on is that of increasing the knowledge and developing the skills to participate wisely in the process of selecting, evalu-

ating, developing and/or using test instruments and data. Parents, teachers, school board members, admissions officers, principals, the media, - the list goes on - all need some type of training to increase their ability to be involved in the testing process and to use the data (scores) appropriately. One strategy we have adopted is to identify professional associations to which these types of individuals belong and to arrange to offer instructional programs as part of their annual or periodic meetings.

Any agenda for the 1980's is going to be crowded with needed instructional services related to testing. It's exciting and challenging ; it's also a very big job! I hope that the efforts will find groups like ETS and continuing education groups working together to meet these needs.